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## Fourth Committee

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*Chairman*: Mr. Maitland ..... (South Africa)

## Contents

Agenda item 76 : United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Agenda item 76 : United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**
(A/57/13, A/57/282, A/57/294, A/57338, A/57/455, A/57/456, A/57/462)

1. **Mr. Hansen** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) (UNRWA), introducing the UNRWA report for the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002 (A/57/13), said that the escalation of violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel, which was now in its second year, did not give grounds for any optimism about the future. As Catherine Bertini, the Secretary General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, emphasized in her report, an alarming humanitarian situation had developed in the region. Poverty levels in the Occupied Palestinian had risen above 60 per cent, and about 50 per cent of the population was unemployed. The Personal Envoy believed that the main reason for the severe decline in economic conditions was the lack of access resulting from a regime of closures and curfews.

2. Since the reoccupation of the main Palestinian population centres in the West Bank, Palestinian traffic had been prohibited from major roads, and secondary roads had been blocked. There were now 73 permanent checkpoints and about 100 temporary checkpoints set up in the West Bank. The regime of curfews had become more intense and widespread. About 688,000 residents of 39 towns, villages, and refugee camps continued to be confined to their homes for long periods almost every day. The Gaza Strip was frequently bisected or trisected with road blocks and checkpoints on the roads connecting its northern, middle, and southern parts. The regime of closures and curfews strangulated all movement, as a result of which humanitarian supplies and vehicles could not reach those in need, and Agency staff could not reach their work places. The Palestinian economy was now in a state of collapse and was totally dependent on external assistance. The most seriously affected were the poorest segments of the population, the largest number of whom were refugees for whom UNRWA had direct responsibility. The costs associated with the introduction by the Israeli authorities of additional security procedures and levies that were applied to UNRWA deliveries, including food and medicines, were becoming a substantial drain on the Agency's already limited financial resources.

3. UNRWA currently faces perhaps one of the most serious challenges in its history. The humanitarian crisis continued to deepen, and the ending of that tragedy undoubtedly lay in finding a just and durable political solution. Since October 2000, the Agency had delivered additional emergency assistance amounting to US$ 150 million to over 210,000 families in the Occupied Palestinian Territory without the need for any significant addition to its staff or infrastructure, and without detriment to its regular refugee programmes in the areas of education, health care, and social services. At the beginning of the year, no one could have predicted such a major intensification in the level of violence, and the emergency appeal for US$ 117 million for 2002 had proven to be inadequate. The Agency had therefore made a supplementary appeal, for an additional US$ 55.7 million. So far, of the US$ 89.4 million pledged, only US$ 48.9 million had been received. The unprecedented humanitarian crisis could become even worse. It could not be expected that there would be significant improvement in that regard in the forthcoming year. UNRWA was therefore preparing to extend the emergency relief programme into 2003.

4. The effectiveness of the Agency in response to the emergency situation depended very much on its ability to carry the additonal burden with its existing infrastructure and trained staff. In order to maintain that ability, the Agency must be assured of an adequately funded regular budget. The Agency's services were a most significant aspect of its ability to contribute to trust and stability in the refugee community. Refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were currently living in extremely harsh conditions and were increasingly looking to the Agency to help alleviate their suffering. Unless additional pledges were forthcoming in the remaining two months of the year, the total would not grow, as had been projected, by 5 per cent in 2002, but would decline by 3 per cent. In the circumstances, donors should take urgent measures in order to maintain the minimum necessary rate of growth of past years. Maintaining a 5 per cent growth in contributions would make it possible to keep up with the growing needs. Preserving the quality and extent of the services provided by the Agency with limited resources was a

continuing challenge, since the resources currently available to the Agency amounted to US$ 70 per capita, as against US$ 200 per capita in early 1973. As a result, a number of coping measures had had to be adopted, such as converting schools to two-shift operation. Nevertheless, even under such conditions, the quality of education and other services had been maintained at the former level.

5. In the context of the management reform process, the Agency had made a number of changes in its education programme. Unfortunately, because of resource constraints, information technology and computer facilities were being introduced in schools on a very limited scale. The Agency was striving to supplement the curricula of the host countries with the help of its educational materials promoting tolerance, conflict resolution, and human rights. The UNRWA health programme sought to maintain World Health Organization methodologies and standards. Projects were being undertaken to integrate water and sewerage systems of refugee camps with municipal and regional systems. The refugee registration system, which would form the basis of a future archive consisting of some 16 million documents, was being computerized. On the basis of experience gained in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the microfinance and microenterprise programme was being extended.

6. The additional costs incurred by the Agency as a result of security restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities had become a serious burden on its operations and resources. The total additional costs over the past two years had risen above US$ 16 million. No one disputed the obvious fact that Israel must take care of its own security, but the enormous amount of resources that were being used to cover those costs instead of meeting the needs of refugees was bound to give rise to objections. Despite those additional burdens, the Agency was continuing to build housing for refugees whose homes had been destroyed or torn down as a result of Israeli military operations. At the same time, the programme continued to focus on meeting immediate needs : food supplies, and where necessary, some cash assistance, job creation, trauma counselling, and special medical services. Meanwhile, it must be stressed once again that the Agency was facing what was perhaps the most challenging humanitarian situation of the past five decades, and that the solution could be found only through vigorous political efforts. Generous contributions by donors would enable the Agency to meet the minimum needs of the refugees to the extent possible. For their part, the staff of UNRWA were unflinching in their determination to continue their noble work under the most difficult of conditions.

7. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, introducing the report of the Working Group (A/57/462), said that the Working Group had continued to follow with concern the difficulties experienced by the Agency and, in particular, its persistent grave financial situation. The Working Group had held two meetings, on 27 September and 10 October 2002, to consider the recent developments in the Agency's financial situation and to prepare its report to the General Assembly. At the beginning of the year, UNRWA had faced a critical financial outlook for 2001, which had subsequently been alleviated by increased donor contributions, as well as the adoption of cost-constraining measures which had enabled the Agency to end the year with a positive working capital for the first time in 10 years. In 2001, UNRWA had had an income of US$ 302.9 million. Those funds had been received against a regular budget of US$ 310.4 million, leaving a deficit of US$ 8.9 million in the cash budget approved by the General Assembly. Moreover, the projects budget for 2001 had been underfunded by US$ 36.8 million. The Agency's working capital, which had stood at negative US$ 4.9 million at the end of 2000, had increased to US$ 8.5 million by the end of 2001. That level of working capital reserves fell far short of the minimum level of US$ 28 million.

8. Repeated funding shortfalls in recent years had severely eroded the cash position of UNRWA. Outstanding pledges, port charges, and unreimbursed amounts owed to the Agency had exacerbated its cash position. By the end of 2002, UNRWA faced the prospect of a funding gap of US$ 16.7 million in its 2002 regular cash budget. Moreover, of the US$ 271.3 million of contribution income expected for the regular budget in 2002, only US$ 189.8 million had been received by the end of September 2002, and pledges amounting to US$ 81.5 million were still unpaid.

9. The Commissioner-General had made strenous efforts to keep donors informed about the Agency's financial situation. Responding to the special appeals made by the Secretary-General, the major donors had repeatedly made generous contributions for the funding

of the regular and project budgets of UNRWA. In addition, in order to generate a sustainable flow of funds, UNRWA had appealed to donors to pay their pledged contributions earlier in the calendar or budget years and to ensure the payment of pledges on time. The Agency's budget requirements for the 2002-2003 biennium of US$ 791.7 million had been approved by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. The total allocated for 2002 was US$ 386.3 million. The budget reflected the minimum funding requirements that resulted from the integration of new educational programmes in the school curricula of the host countries.

10. The Working Group was once again deeply concerned about the financial prospects of UNRWA. The austerity measures adopted over the past nine years had had a negative effect on the quality of the services provided by the Agency to about 4 million Palestinian refugees. Given the gravity of that situation, the Working Group emphasized that it was the responsibility of the international community to ensure the maintenance of UNRWA services of acceptable quality. The Working Group noted with satisfaction that UNRWA had made significant progress towards reducing the impact of the structural deficit problem, particularly through the introduction of the 1999 Area Staff Rules. The Group commended the Commissioner-General and all UNRWA staff for their tireless efforts to maintain the basic operations of the Agency. The Working Group expressed alarm at the effects that the successive austerity measures adopted in previous years had had on the Agency's humanitarian operations. Those measures had prevented programmes from expanding at a rate commensurate with that of the increase in the number of refugees. The Group was gravely concerned about the impact of those measures on the lives of the Palestine refugees, particularly in areas such as education and health care, and feared that additional budget cuts could cause severe social and economic hardship to an already suffering refugee population, and also place an increased burden on the authorities of the countries hosting the refugees.

11. The Working Group agreed that the problem of the refugees was deeply rooted in a political issue which had originated more than a half a century earlier and that must be settled once and for all in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions. The problems currently faced by the refugees were, however, humanitarian problems that must be addressed as a shared international responsibility. The services provided by UNRWA must be viewed as the minimum required to enable the refugees to lead productive lives. Any further reduction in those services could have a destabilizing effect on the entire region. The Group expressed the hope that the international support for UNRWA embodied in the resolutions adopted each year by the General Assembly would be translated into the adoption of measures to ensure survival of the Agency on a secure financial basis.

12. The Working Group strongly urged all Governments to bear in mind those considerations when deciding upon the level of their contributions to UNRWA for 2003, and also urged Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA to start to do so; Governments that had so far made only relatively small contributions to increase their contributions; Governments that in the past had made generous contributions to UNRWA to continue to do so in a timely manner and to strive to increase them; and Governments that traditionally had shown a special interest in the welfare of the Palestine refugees, both in the region and beyond to begin contributing or to increase their contributions. Moreover, it strongly urged Governments to consider making special contributions sufficient to cover the deficit and build up working capital, so that UNRWA services could continue uninterrupted and the Agency could restore services cut as a result of the austerity measures, and to ensure that donor support of emergency-related and special programmes or capital projects did not in any way decrease or divert contributions to the Agency's regular programmes.

13. **Ms. Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) said that Palestine refugees, like all other refugees, had an inherent right to their homes and property, which was affirmed in paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 and in all subsequent resolutions. Certain principles remained constant, despite the passage of time or changes in conditions on the ground. In that regard, it was appropriate to stress the importance of the right to private ownership, including land. According to the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, 5.5 million dunums of land belonged to the Palestine refugees, Israel must recognize that ownership, and its restoration or compensation must be

the cornerstone of any settlement of the Palestine refugee problem. It was also important to reaffirm the right of the Palestinians displaced in 1967 to return to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. That right had first been affirmed in Security Council resolution 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967 and should have been realized several years earlier during the transitional period. Regrettably, that right too had remained unfulfilled because Israel, as before, was not complying with its obligations. One more principle must be clarified and reaffirmed, and that was the distinction between the right of the Palestine refugees to return or to receive compensation and the inherent right of every Palestinian to Palestinian nationality and citizenship in the State of Palestine in the future.

14. UNRWA had played a vital and historic role in alleviating the plight of the Palestine refugees. The desperate living conditions of the Palestine refugees, who now numbered more than 4 million would undoubtedly have deteriorated even further had it not been for the intervention of the international community through support of the Agency. The services provided by UNRWA to the Palestine refugees were indispensable, and for many refugees had become a matter of survival. As described in the Commissioner-General's report, the socio-econoomic situation of the Palestine refugees had remained difficult in all areas of operation, namely the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period. The situation continued to be characterized by extreme poverty, high unemployment, and inadequate and overburdened infrastructures. The conditions on the ground had continued to deteriorate during the reporting period, primarily due to the escalating of the Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people. That, of course, had also had an impact on the work of the UNRWA and had placed an even greater burden on the Agency and on its staff and resources.

15. While the Palestine refugees throughtout the region continued to suffer hardships and despair, the situation of the Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had grown markedly worse, because Israel, the occupying Power, had intensified its activities in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The events currently taking place, in which Palestinians were once again living in tents, after being forced to flee from their homes, having hurriedly gathered their belongings from beneath the rubble of their destroyed dwellings, were a painful reminder of the tragedy that had occurred in 1948. Although the issue of the practices of the occupying Power directed against the Palestinian people including war crimes, state terrorism, and systematic human rights violations, would be discussed under agenda item 77, it was necessary to refer at least briefly to those policies and practices, because they had a direct impact on the situation of the Palestine refugees and the operations of UNRWA.

16. During the reporting period, Israel's military campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had escalated to unprecedented levels. In Narah, that campaign had intensified dramatically as a result of which a large number of Palestinians had been killed or wounded, and homes, properties, institutions, and vital infrastructure had been destroyed. Since 28 September 2000, the Israel occupying forces had killed almost 2,000 Palestinians, including children, women, elderly people, and men. Many of those who had died had been Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. Dozens of refugees had been killed as a result of the military assault on the Jenin refugee camp alone, in April 2002, and some Palestinians had died while waiting for emergency assistance. According to the data of the Commissioner-General, 2,629 shelters housing 13,145 refugees, had been damaged in the refugee camps. In the Jenin camp alone, 400 families had become homeless, and more than 1,000 shelters had been damaged. Israel's imposition of closures and severe restrictions, including round-the-clock curfews, had gravely impacted the socio-economic situation of the Palestine refugees, hindering or completely blocking their access to work, schools, health care, and even food and clean water, which had created a dire humanitarian crisis, all of which had seriously affected the operations of UNRWA and undermined its ability to assist the Palestine refugees.

17. In violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations, the Israeli occupying forces had repeatedly disrupted and obstructed the work of UNRWA during the reporting period. As reflected in the report, the delivery of humanitarian supplies, including food, medicine, blood and other urgently needed items, had often been blocked, and restrictions had been placed on the movement of the Agency's staff and vehicles, including doctors, nurses, and teachers. Moreover, at

Israeli checkpoints, Agency staff had been harassed and humiliated; Agency vehicles, including ambulances, had been searched; and military personnel had detained those vehicles and prevented them from transporting patients in need of urgent medical care.

18. In the light of those developments, the international community needed to emphasize again that UNRWA, like all other United Nations agencies must be allowed to carry out its mandate without any restrictions. That meant that Israel, the occupying Power, must comply with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as with its obligations and responsibilities under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations of 1946 and the agreement it had signed with UNRWA. Thus, Israel must compensate the Agency for the damage done to its facilities and equipment and must remove as soon as possible all restrictions on the movement of the Agency's staff and goods. Israelis actions not only hindered the activities of UNRWA on the ground, but also placed greater burdens on the Agency's already limited resources, as noted in the report of the Commissioner-General.

19. She expressed gratitude to the donor community for their generous contributions during the reporting period in response to appeals for emergency assistance. Without those contributions, the Agency would not have been able to provide assistance in the amount necessary for meeting the needs of the refugee population. Moreover, because UNRWA was dependent on the contributions of donors, she urged donor countries to continue their contributions and, if possible, to augment them, so as to help the Agency overcome its financial problems and enable it to provide the necessary services to the refugees. In conclusion, she expressed deep appreciation to the countries hosting the refugees and commended the efforts of Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic to facilitate the Agency's work.

20. **Mr. Fallouh** (Syrian Arab Republic), after expressing appreciation to the Commissioner-General and his staff for their tireless efforts under extremely difficult conditions to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and to the donor countries that were providing the material and financial resources that were enabling the Agency to continue to deliver the minimum services needed by the Palestine refugees, recalled that the Commissioner-General, in his report (A/57/13), expressed the hope that the work of UNRWA would be intensified in order to meet the minimum needs of the Palestine refugees who had suffered twice as a result of Israel's actions : first when Israel had forced them to leave their homes, and then when Palestinian camps and schools had been attacked by the Israeli armed forces, using aircraft, tanks, and artillery. Moreover, the Commissioner-General expressed concern about the decline in the quality of the Agency's services, as well as about attacks on UNRWA staff and on groups providing medical and humanitarian assistance to the refugees, including groups acting under the flag of the United Nations. That was a flagrant violation of the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations of 1946, and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

21. The escalation of aggression and the criminal actions of Israel were a threat to the lives and the freedom of movement of United Nations staff in the occupied territories. It should be emphasized that Israel was the aggressor, and that it was the Israelis who had occupied Palestinian territories, destroyed the homes of Palestinians, and committed bloody crimes against the Palestinian people. In response to Israel's actions and provocations, the Palestinian people, driven to despair, had risen in revolt to resist the occupiers. The principles of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly legitimized that resistance.

22. The Syrian Arab Republic, as a State hosting Palestinian refugees, had provided and was continuing to provide all kinds of assistance to the Palestinians living in its territory. It treated Palestinians in the same way as its own citizens, without any discrimination. It continued to cooperate with UNRWA and was providing it with all possible support. The Syrian Arab Republic was bearing a heavy financial burden in trying to provide a decent life for the Palestinian refugees living in its territory, as noted in paragraphs 35 and 212-226 of the Commissioner-General's report. It was providing assistance to Palestinian refugees in areas such as education, health care, social services, housing and social welfare.

23. The Syrian Arab Republic commended the efforts of the Commissioner-General and his staff to raise the quality of the services provided by the Agency to the Palestinian refugees in its territory. It should be noted

that the responsiblity for the fate of the Palestinians was borne by the international community, and the Syrian Arab Republic believed that UNRWA must continue its work until a solution was found to the Palestinian problem in keeping with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. It was disturbing that, according to the report, the average amount spent per refugee was declining, whereas the number of refugees was increasing. In that connection, the Syrian Arab Republic urged donor countries to fullfil their financial commitments to the Agency and to increase the size of their contributions. It opposed any reduction or termination of the Agency's work in providing services to the Palestinian refugees to meet their daily needs, including those in the areas of education and health care. Moreover, his delegation believed that the Agency should not shift the burden of funding to the Palestinian refugees or the host countries.

24. Paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, stressed the right of the Palestine refugees to repatriation and the return of their property. The General Assembly in its resolutions reaffirmed that right every year. Bearing in mind the overall situation in the region, it should be noted that ignoring the threats that were arising in connection with the refugee problem ran counter to the efforts aimed at a comprehensive settlement of the crisis in the Middle East, as well as the principles of international legitimacy and General Assembly resolutions. The current situation, which had arisen as a result of Israel's aggressive and provocative actions, using brutal military force against the Palestinians and attacking UNRWA facilities and schools on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, demonstrated that Israel did not wish to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the region that would ensure the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to their lands.

25. **Ms. Løj** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the European Union, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the associated countries (Cyprus, Malta, and Turkey), as well as the European Free Trade Association countries of the European Economic Area (Iceland and Liechtenstein), said that UNRWA was a central element in the system for immediate international response to crises. In the past year, however, severe restrictions had been placed on the access and mobility of the Agency. The European Union noted with concern the many reported instances of destruction of UNRWA facilities and installations and even attacks on staff members, some of whom had been killed or injured. The prevailing situation was unacceptable. The European Union reiterated its call to Israel to lift the closures and curfews and stop the destruction of the economic infrastructure in the occupied territories. Freedom of movement of persons and goods must be restored immediately. Israel must act in line with the norms of international humanitarian law and respect the neutrality and security of all UNRWA staff and installations. The unhindered access of humanitarian organizations to the Palestinian civilian population must be ensured at all times.

26. In 2001 there had been some encouraging developments with respect to the Agency's UNRWA regular budget and the working capital had amounted to US$ 8.5 million. However, there was a serious financing gap in the general budget of UNRWA for 2002. The current financial situation of the Agency demanded action from all States Members of the United Nations, which must ensure substantial and regular contributions so that the Agency could carry out its mandate.

27. The European Union remained the principal UNRWA donor. In response to UNRWA appeals, the European Community had increased its funding for the 2002-2005 period to 237 million euros, which would be a solid financial base for cooperation between the European Union and UNRWA during the next two biennial budget cycles. The European Union welcomed the agreements reached with the Palestinian Authority regarding value-added tax exemptions in Gaza and hoped that a similar agreement could be reached for the West Bank. The European Union supported the ongoing reforms in UNRWA and hoped that the introduction of key performance budget indicators would lead to increased transparency and efficiency. Under the current difficult conditions, the promotion of management reform and strategic planning were being hampered. The European Union urged the Agency to strive to continue all efforts to increase efficiency, identify priorities, and establish a dialogue.

28. **Mr. Abu Zeid** (Egypt) said that the general deterioration of the situation for more than two years in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had affected the

living conditions of the Palestinian refugees not only in the camps, but also in neighboring Arab countries. The refugees were bereft of hope of a safe return to their homeland, and the general deterioration of the situation had resulted in a reduction in the funds allocated by UNRWA per refugee. The grave humanitarian situation that had come about in the occupied territories was reflected in the report of the Secretary-General's Special Humanitarian Envoy. The events in the Jenin camp, the unceasing raids in the Gaza Strip, and the blockade of various Palestinian cities demonstrated that Israel, the occupying Power, was persisting in its stubborn defiance of the will of the international community as expressed in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Commissioner-General's report revealed a number of facts on which the Committee must take a firm stand, since they were consistent with the facts presented by other sources.

29. Currently, about 50 per cent of the Palestinians lived below the poverty line, and 26 per cent were unemployed. Moreover, the number of displaced persons and homeless people had increased. In Jenin alone, 400 families had no roof over their heads, and the number of children suffering from malnutrition was growing. The actions taken by Israeli authorities had also limited the ability of UNRWA to provide humanitarian assistance. Notwithstanding those difficulties, the Agency was managing to provide services in the areas of education, health care, and emergency assistance. Egypt welcomed the administrative and financial reforms in UNRWA, which would help strengthen it. Egypt shared the concern expressed in the Commissioner-General's report about the plight of Palestinian refugees in certain other countries. In that connection, his delegation appealed to all countries of the world to make concerted efforts to assist in improving the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and in refugee camps in other countries. Israel's continuing aggressive actions against the Palestinian people and its leaders and the retaliatory violence were only preparing the ground for further violence and would frustrate any efforts to achieve peace.

30. **Mr. Hassan** (Jordan) said that his Government believed that the sustainable operation of UNRWA in Jordan and other parts of the region could not be compromised as long as the issue of Palestinian refugees remained unresolved. Accordingly, his Government urged donors to alleviate the dire financial situation of the Agency by paying their contributions in full. Jordan welcomed the decision of the European Union to increase its support to UNRWA to 237 million euros for the period from 2002 to 2005 and hoped that the Agency's appeal for an additional US$ 167.7 million for the 2002 budget would be met.

31. Jordan called upon Israel to cooperate with UNRWA and adhere fully to the agreements reached with UNRWA thus allowing freedom of movement for UNRWA staff within the occupied Palestinian territories, and to refrain from destroying additional UNRWA infrastructure and facilities in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza.

32. Jordan was hosting 42.3 per cent of the total number of Palestinian refugees and 90 per cent of the people who had been displaced after the events of 1967. Approximately 1.7 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA were living in Jordan. Over the 54 years of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan had tripled. While a total of US$ 71.1 million had been allocated from the UNRWA regular budget for operations in Jordan in 2002, his Government was spending approximately 5.67 times that amount on various services for the Palestinian refugees in the areas of health care, education, security, upkeep of camps, and social services. His Government spent a total of about US$ 403 million a year for the maintenance of the Palestinian refugee camps.

33. Despite the fact that a vast majority of those refugees and displaced persons were Jordanian citizens, they retained their rights in Palestine. Jordanian citizenship had been granted to them on the basis of the declaration of unity between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the West Bank in 1950. Nevertheless, Jordanian citizenship and the privileges associated with it did not cancel or limit the rights of the refugees in their homeland.

34. **Mr. Wang Donghua** (China) said that over the past year there had been an intensification in the scale of the violence, which had resulted in a deterioration of the security situation in the region. That had also exacerbated the dire situation of the civilian population, particularly the Palestinian refugees, and had further complicated the work of UNRWA in providing humanitarian assistance. The Agency's activities were an integral part of the peace process in

the Middle East, and for that reason they needed to be supported and enhanced; in the meantime, however, a gap remained between the volume of resources at the Agency's disposal and its actual needs. That situation would affect the work of UNRWA and must be given due attention by the international community. The solution of the Middle East problem must include not only political, but also economic aspects. China would continue to support the Agency's work and contribute to its funding; it hoped that the international community would also support the Agency's efforts to provide assistance to the Palestinian refugees by making generous contributions. China called on Israel to rescind the restrictions and ensure the safety of Agency personnel. The solution of the Palestinian refugee problem depended on an early and complete solution of the Middle East problem. His delegation hoped that Israel and Palestine would focus on the interests of their peoples, renounce violence and retaliatory violence, and work together with international intermediaries towards the speedy achievement of peace in accordance with the principle of land for peace.

35. **Mr. Mekel** (Israel) said that his delegation wished to formally record its appreciation to UNRWA for the work it was doing, particularly in the fields of health care and education. Israel was committed to maintaining a productive working relationship with the Agency. The Agency's work had been particularly difficult in the past year because of the escalation of the campaign of terrorism launched by the Palestinians against the citizens of Israel. The security measures taken by Israel were a consequence, not a cause, of the difficult situation in the region. The current predicament of the Palestinian people was the inevitable result of the conscious abandonment of negotiations in favour of violence and terrorism.

36. Prior to September 2000, as a result of the Oslo peace process, the Palestinian people had achieved real, tangible gains, namely, increased autonomy, self-rule, and greater political status, as well as an influx of foreign investment and enhanced cooperation with Israel and the international community. But the violence and terrorism had all but wiped out those gains. Within the framework of the peace process, Israel and the Palestinians had agreed that the refugee question would be addressed within the context of final status negotiations. Israel therefore could not accept efforts to circumvent the bilateral negotiating process, because such efforts merely distracted attention from the core issues of the conflict and detracted from the ability of the parties to resolve those issues bilaterally. For that reason, Israel objected to the politicization of the resolutionss adopted annually by the Committee because they were replete with politically charged language, ignored the decisions of the Madrid Peace Conference, and sought to prejudge the final outcome of the negotiations, which must be determined through discussions between the parties themselves.

37. It must not be forgotten that the circumstances that had produced the problem of the Palestinian refugees had also produced another group of refugees : the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been forced to leave Arab lands in which they had lived for centuries. Unlike Palestinian refugees, however, Jewish refugees were not being kept in poverty by their host State to serve callous political interests. But the Arab States, with one exception, were refusing to take practical steps to alleviate the plight of the refugees they had accepted. The total Arab contribution to UNRWA still amounted to less than 1 per cent of the Agency's annual budget.

38. Israel was genuinely sympathetic to the plight of the refugees and, often at risk to its own security, had taken steps to improve the situation of the Palestinian people. Some 25,000 Palestinians, in addition to some 8,000 business people and merchants, entered Israel to work every day. Even when security conditions were difficult, Israel made every effort to ensure that medical and rescue workers, municipal services, and other commercial and public service activities operated freely. The flow of goods to and from Gaza and the West Bank was continuing almost without interruption. The Sufa Crossing, which had previously been used only for the transport of building materials, had been opened, and UNRWA humanitarian goods were now able to pass through it.

39. Israel was committed to finding a long-term, pragmatic and humanitarian sollution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees within the framework of permanent status negotiations. In July 2000, at Camp David, Israel had proposed important ideas in that respect within the framework of a larger peace proposal. Those proposals had not only been rejected - they had been met by an outbreak of violence and terrorism.

40. While Israel was completely committed to the humanitarian work of UNRWA, there were several aspects of the Agency's conduct which it found troubling. Since the onset of violence in September 2000, Palestinian terrorists had used refugee camps and other UNRWA facilities as their bases. While UNRWA had been quick to draw attention to Israeli practices that impeded its work, it had yet to condemn the practices of Palestinian terrorists that directly endangered the population it had been charged with assisting.

41. As the Secretary-General noted in his report prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/10, Palestinian militants in the camps and elsewhere had adopted methods which constituted breaches of international law that had been and continued to be condemned by the United Nations. While recognizing that providing security in the refugee camps was not part of the Agency's mandate, Israel nonetheless believed that the Agency had a responsibility to draw attention to those blatant violations of international humanitarian law. Over the past two years, Israel had encountered incidents in which terrorists had used ambulances bearing international symbols, such as that of the Red Crescent, to smuggle weapons, munitions and even suicide bombers. Israel was also disturbed by the Agency's cooperation with the Arab boycott of Israel and companies that did business with Israel. By cooperating with an economic weapon used by the Arab States against the commercial interests of the State of Israel, the Agency was violating its obligation to act impartially. Moreover, the public activities of UNRWA in the form of press releases, statements to the media and so forth, went beyond its purely humanitarian mandate. Israel had strong reservations regarding UNRWA statements that were of a political nature and did not take into account the full context of the security situation that Israel was facing. In that light, it was hardly surprising that the debate on UNRWA and the resolutions adopted annually by the Committee were entirely one-sided. Aside from misrepresenting the reality on the ground, those resolutions would do nothing to return the parties to a political process. The resolutions on UNRWA should be consolidated into one resolution that was counterproductive and free of inflammatory political language.

42. His delegation wished to emphasize once again that while Israel was concerned about the situation of the Palestinian refugees and would continue to do everything in its power to assist them, the most important contribution that could be made was to restore an environment conducive to a political process. Israel hoped that other Member States would recognize that and would place the interests of the people of the region above their personal political objectives.

43. **Mr. Karagoz** (Turkey) said that the grim situation in the Middle East remained a cause of great concern for the entire international community. Despite intensive diplomatic efforts, the negative developments on the ground gave no reason to hope that an atmosphere conducive to the achievement of lasting peace, security, and stability would soon be reached. Turkey deplored the tragic events that had occurred. Both parties had a responsibility to end the violence and the escalation of tension. Turkey reiterated its position of principle that terrorism could not be justified under any pretext and was doomed to fail in any case.

44. Various components of the serious humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territory had worsened the already adverse living conditions of the Palestinian refugees. However, his delegation was pleased to note that UNRWA was continuing to play its crucial role in meeting the vital humanitarian needs of that most vulnerable part of the Palestinian population. With its 52 years of unique experience in the field of humanitarian relief, UNRWA remained an indispensable component of the resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem by providing education, health care, relief and social services, as well as microfinance and microenterprise programmes for about 4 million refugees.

45. Turkey remained firmly committed to the goals and mandate of UNRWA. It was convinced that the uninterrupted provision of UNRWA services during the current difficulties was essential to restoring calm and stability. In that respect, his delegation expressed its regret that the closures, curfews and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had resulted in restriction of the mobility of the Palestinian population and had had repercussions on their daily lives and their future, as well as impacting the Agency's ability to carry out its operations effectively in support of Palestine refugees.

Turkey called upon Israel to lift the closures and other restrictive measures imposed upon the Palestinians.

46. During the reporting period, the movement of humanitarian goods, particularly to places where they were urgently needed, had been blocked, delayed, or made very difficult. Obstacles had also been placed in the way of medical personnel participating in humanitarian operations. Turkey condemned acts of killing, beating, injuring or humiliating UNRWA personnel.

47. The Agency's recurrent financial crises remained a cause of profound concern. Turkey fully supported the emergency appeals launched in 2002, aimed at overcoming the existing difficulties. It was regrettable, however, that the Agency was facing a deficit of US$ 16.7 million in its regular budget for 2002. Addressing humanitarian problems required collective responsibility and pragmatic steps. Turkey welcomed the strengthening of the Agency's communications and information capacity and supported the reform process with respect to internal management.

48. **Mr. Hadi Ali** (Malaysia) said that his delegation continued to attach great importance to the work of UNRWA aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, through programmes for improving their socio-economic conditions. The presence of UNRWA in the region was critical to the well-being of the refugees in the mounting humanitarian crisis and should continue until a just and lasting peace was established in the Middle East.

49. His delegation strongly condemned the military offensive launched by the Israeli Defense Forces against Palestinian cities, towns, villages, and refugee camps, which had resulted in widespread damage to and destruction of Palestinian property and infrastructure, including governmental institutions, residential buildings, refugee shelters, water and electricity supply systems and sewage disposal systems, as well as UNRWA installations such as schools, training centres, and health care facilities. It was dismayed to note that Israeli forces were using a number of seized UNRWA schools as bases and centres for detention and interrogation of Palestinians. The Commissioner-General's comments regarding the measures imposed by the Israeli authorities to control movement to and from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were a cause for grave concern. Those restrictions had had a negative impact on the Agency's humanitarian work. They had disrupted the lives of the Palestinians and intensified the downturn of the Palestinian economy, causing increased unemployment. Moreover, the delivery of humanitarian goods to those who needed them was often blocked, delayed, or made very difficult, and, because of the actions of Israeli forces, UNRWA staff and vehicles faced life-threatening situations which had sometimes even resulted in death. His delegation called on Israel to fulfil its obligations under the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the bilateral agreement between UNRWA and the Government of Israel and to comply with the international norms on humanitarian access.

50. His delegation was concerned about the budgetary constraints and other problems UNRWA faced in delivering services. Despite those constraints, UNRWA was continuing to perform effectively the tasks assigned to it. As the Commissioner-General had observed, improving the financial situation required concerted steps by donor countries to maintain at least the previous year's improvement in the rate of growth of contributions, so that the structural deficits in its budget could be eliminated and a sound basis could be established for its future financial viability. For its part, Malaysia would continue to contribute within its means to the work of UNRWA, over and above its bilateral assistance to the Palestinian people. His delegation expressed the hope that other members of the international community would also make contributions to UNRWA so as to improve its capacity to assist the Palestine refugees.

51. **Mr. Laggner** (Switzerland) said that, more than 50 years after its creation, UNRWA remained an indispensable humanitarian institution that, in providing assistance to 3.8 million Palestinian refugees, was translating the solidarity of the international community into concrete deeds. As noted in the Commissioner-General's report, the staff of UNRWA, despite difficult working conditions were managing to carry out the programmes for providing assistance to refugees. His delegation fully supported the efforts to identify and provide targeted support to the neediest categories of the population, particularly in the occupied territories. Switzerland was providing support to UNRWA by making contributions to its regular budget, as well as by allocating additional

funds in response to the Agency's appeals for emergency assistance. In that connection, he appealed to all donors, traditional and potential, to consider the additional needs caused by the deterioration of the situation on the ground.

52. The closures and other restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories were having dire effects on Palestinian civilians, as had been confirmed in several independent investigations. It must be borne in mind that the refugees represented the most vulnerable category of the population. All humanitarian organizations were experiencing difficulties in gaining access to persons in need of assistance, as a result of which it was becoming increasingly difficult to evaluate specific needs and monitor the implementation of programmes. In that connection, the efforts of UNRWA to improve the quality of its status reports were commendable.

53. Switzerland attached great importance to the coordination of humanitarian assistance. In that connection, it appealed to United Nations agencies and programmes to continue to pursue a strategy based on complementarity and non-duplication of operational activities. UNRWA should ensure a permanent dialogue with other participants in humanitarian activity, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had a unique and independent role deriving from the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The report also focused attention on the frequent actions of the Israeli Defense Forces that ran counter to the norms of international law. Those actions were also at variance with the obligations emanating from the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations of 1946 and the 1967 bilateral agreement between the Government of Israel and UNRWA.

54. Switzerland called upon the Israeli authorities to ensure unhindered access to the occupied territories to humanitarian organizations for the purpose of providing services to the population and refugees living there. That applied to the import and delivery of relief materials, as well as the transport of the sick and the injured, and conformed to the agreements concluded between the Government of Israel and UNRWA.

55. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba) said that the work of UNRWA was acquiring increasing importance in view of the continuing escalation of violence against the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territories. Since its inception, UNRWA had been carrying out highly commendable work to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees. His delegation expressed its deepest concern about the budgetary and financial problems of the Agency, which were undermining its ability to respond effectively to the growing needs of the refugees.

56. Cuba expressed its appreciation to all countries and institutions whose assistance was making it possible for the Palestinian refugees to receive the support of the international community that they needed so much. In addition, Cuba reiterated its support for the UNRWA appeal that the volume of contributions and resources should be maintained and increased in order to face the current challenges. His delegation found it regrettable that the Government of Israel was maintaining the restrictions that were hindering the performance of the Agency's functions.

57. **Mr. Kabtani** (Tunisia) said that his delegation had carefully studied the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and was grateful to the host countries for accommodating Palestinian refugees and providing them services for 50 years, as well as to the donor countries for the material and financial assistance that enabled UNRWA to continue to carry out its mandate. The functions performed by UNRWA were of fundamental importance to the provision of services to Palestinian refugees, which would make it possible for them to exercise their inalienable rights within the framework of a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian problem. The financial difficulties which UNRWA faced were having a negative effect on the provision of those services. His delegation appealed to the international community, particularly donor countries, to increase their contributions to the funding of UNRWA so that it could carry out its humanitarian programme. UNRWA should also expand its cooperation with international organizations, which would enable it to provide assistance more effectively to Palestinian refugees. At the same time, UNRWA needed to increase the efficiency of its methods of management and operation.

58. The actions of Israel as the occupying Power gave cause for profound concern and were hindering the work of UNRWA; they were directed against UNRWA facilities and personnel and included the destruction and damaging of buildings and facilities and refugee locations, such as in the Jenin refugee camp, and the closing of UNRWA schools and their use

as military camps and centres. Those actions contravened international law and the agreements signed between Israel and UNRWA. His delegation called for the adoption of emergency measures to remove the restrictions on the movement of UNRWA personnel and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian refugees. Tunisia reaffirmed its support for UNRWA and emphasized the need to focus primary attention on the refugee question, given that the rights of the refugees were laid down in General Assembly resolutions, specifically its resolution 194 (III) adopted in 1948. That would make it possible to strengthen the basis for security and stability throughout the region.

59. **Mr. Nguyen Van Bao** (Viet Nam) said that, over the past 50 years, the Palestinian people had become refugees in their own land. More than 4 million Palestine refugees, including 1.45 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, were living in conditions of poverty, the economy was in a critical state and 50 per cent of the Palestinians lived below the poverty line. Meanwhile, the Agency should be commended for its efforts to help the Palestinian people, as should the donor countries for their generous contributions, which were helping alleviate the sufferings of those people. The Palestinians were not in that situation by choice. Their plight was rooted in a political issue with which everyone was familiar. The escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially after Israel's military operations in the city of Ramallah, the destruction of President Arafat's headquarters, and the killing of innocent Palestinians, gave cause for deep concern. Those actions were undermining the peace process, sowing hatred between the two sides, and threatening peace, security and stability in the Middle East and in the region as a whole.

60. Viet Nam, along with other members of the international community, called for an immediate freeze on the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and urged the two sides to return to the negotiating table to resolve the conflict by peacefull means. For many years, the United Nations had undertaken efforts to achieve a peace agreement in the Middle East. Viet Nam continued to support the United Nations in its efforts to help resolve the conflict and expressed its appreciation of and continued support for the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, UNRWA, non-governmental organizations and other bodies to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people.

61. **Mr. Percaya** (Indonesia) said that, despite the multitude of difficulties caused by the turbulent events of the past year, UNRWA had once again proven itself as one of the most successful humanitarian programmes of the United Nations. The Palestinian economy, in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, was undergoing a severe downturn. From September 2000 to December 2001, total unemployment had risen from 10 per cent to 26 per cent. UNRWA operations had begun to experience disruptions, and increasing incidents of destruction of its offices and equipment. UNRWA staff had been fired upon by Israeli forces, and some of them had been killed, injured, beaten, or humiliated. In addition, the Agency had endured closures of its operations, restrictions and checkpoint delays. Given all that, it was particularly gratifying that, even under those conditions, UNRWA was continuing to serve Palestinian refugees so well.

62. UNRWA had made great strides in the areas of education, health care, communications, and internal management reforms, as well as in the provision of relief and social services. Indonesia hoped that donors would take the necessary steps to ensure that the solid achievements of UNRWA were not put in jeopardy. Despite the hostile circumstances in which it had to operate, UNRWA had achieved considerable success and had become the symbol of the international community's commitment to ensuring the well-being of the Palestinian refugees until a just and lasting settlement of the refugee problem was achieved. Indonesia would continue to extend its support to UNRWA. UNRWA must not lack the resources needed to fulfil its mission. Indonesia believed that the work of the Agency was a viable foundation for establishing peace and stability in the Middle East and deserved the international community's unconditional support.

63. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway) said that, over the past two years, the situation in the Palestinian Territory had deteriorated dramatically. At the current critical stage, it was more important than ever to provide UNRWA the means and resources it needed to fulfil its mandate and to maintain the level of its services. The international community must give the Agency the means to carry out its tasks. In fulfilling the mandate of UNRWA, Agency staff often risked their very lives. Norway emphasized that the Government of Israel must respect the norms of international humanitarian law in the Palestinian Territory. Any attempts to obstruct the work of UNRWA constituted a violation of

the humanitarian norms that the international community was obliged to uphold. The immunity that UNRWA enjoyed as an international humanitarian organization must also be respected. The conflict in the Middle East could never be resolved by militar means. The only possible solution to the current situation would have to be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002).

64. Norway remained committed to maintaining the level of support and, subject to parliamentary approval, intended to grant approximately US$ 13 million to the UNRWA General Fund for 2003. In response to the emergency appeals of UNRWA, his Government had made a total contribution of US$ 3.4 million and had provided funding for the reconstruction of refugee homes in Gaza.

65. **The Chairman**, recalling that delegations had held consultations on agenda item 77, suggested that, based on the general agreement reached in those consultations, the Committee should defer its consideration of that item until 11 and 12 November 2002.

66. *It was so decided.*

67. **The Chairman** suggested that, in light of the decision just taken and given that the Committee traditionally took action on resolutions pertaining to agenda items 76 and 77 at the same meeting, the Committee should defer taking action on those draft resolutions until the meeting on Tuesday, 12 November.

68. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 12 :55 p.m.*